

John Caldwell Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, December 29, 1817, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY CALHOUN TO JACKSON.

War Department, December 29, 1817.

Sir, The enclosed general orders have issued from this department. Unconnected with the cause, which originally occasioned them, I have been influenced in framing them wholly by regard to the publick interest. I am aware, the subject is delicate and important; but I trust, that in practice no inconvenience under their present form, will be experienced. The general rule is, that all orders in the first instance will issue to commanders of division; and this rule to be deviated from only when the publick interest may require it. The correctness of the rule itself cannot be doubted. Order, dicipline and responsibility all concur in establishing it. But that there are exceptions to the rule, is to my mind not less clear. The very principles on which it is established, point out the exceptions. Why maintain order dicipline and responsibility, but to give to the movements of the army promptitude and success? When, then, they can only be had by deviating from the established rule, the exception becomes the rule. That such cases must occur, a mere reference to the great extent of the divisions furnishes incontestible proof. I will not press the subject farther; for I perceive by looking over the correspondence with the President, the orders accord substantially with your view in relation to this subject. You insist on the rule, that orders ought to issue to the commanders of division, as they are responsible. This rule is the basis of the orders which have been adopted. You admit that necessity may cause exceptions to it; and it is the only cause of exception recognized by the orders; for I presume, when we speak of necessity in this case, we only mean a due regard to the publick inter[e]st. If then we are agreed in our mode of viewing this subject in the abstract,

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we shall find little inconvenience in practice. For, on my part, standing, as I do, in relation to the army, it is my duty and will be my pride, to consult on all occasions, with due regard to higher obligations to the publick, its inter[e]st and honor. Permit me to say that to you individually, I participate in those feelings of respect, which any lover of his country has towards you. In any effort to add greater perfection to our military establishment, I must mainly rely for support on your weight of character and information. I cannot therefore conclude, without expressing the wish, that our country may long continue to be benefited by your military services.

With sentiment of esteem I am etc

[*Indorsement:*] from Secy. of War enclosing Genl. order of 29th Decr. 1817

1 The General Order, signed by Calhoun for the President, was as follows: "As a general rule, all orders will issue, in the first instance, to the commanders of division. In cases where the nature of the duty to be performed, and the public interest may require it, orders will issue directly to officers commanding departments, posts, or detachments, and to any officer attached to the division; but in such cases, a copy of the orders will be transmitted to General of division, for his information."

[*Jackson's handwriting:*] adopting the principles I contended for, and on which my famed Genl. order was predicated.